

## [F. J. Wootan]

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Beliefs and customs - Occupational lore [118?]

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Phipps, [Woody?]

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist., #7

F.J. (Sam) Wootan, 73, born June 17, 1864. on his father's farm in Madison Co., Tex., learned to ride a horse as soon as he was strong enough to sit on one alone. His father established a ranch in Llano Co., Tex., in 1874. After liquidating this ranch, he established another on the Mason and Llano Co., lines. Bankruptcy forced him out of the cattle business in 1902, and he went to Llano City to live. Sam went to Mexico in 1887. He established a ranch located 150 Mi. S. of Gallegos, Chihuahua, Mex., in 1900. He now owns 1500 head of cattle and resides on this ranch. His story:

"I was born on my father's farm in Madison County, Texas, on June 17, 1864. [ouldn't?] it have been swell if I had been born two days later. When all the [negroes?] would celebrate my birthday. Well, anyway, this farm I was raised on was kind of an unusual farm because my father was so interested in cattle that he dabbled in stock more than he messed with farming. He left the farming more to the fellows that worked. I don't remember the acreage because dad established a ranch when I was only 10 years old, or in 1874. I was a pretty good hand by that time, having rode a hoss since I was big enough to sit one. I expect I

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could ride as well as the average cowmen when I was 10. I was an expert cowboy at 15, and at 17, I won all the roping laurels in my county. [???

“This ranch Dad established was in Llano County, pretty close to Llano. We started out with a small herd and had ups and downs that were something to think about. He run about 10,000 head at one time, and had two brands. One of them was the [IW?], and the other was the [?]. He sold 3,500 steers to Bill Goode at one time.

“Now, I don't remember whether Bill Route had a ranch, or owned a brand. I don't remember whether he road branded these 2 steers or not, either. A road brand was usually a figure added to the original brand. It could be any figure, such as a 6, or an 8. I do remember that I joined the herd after it was started on the drive to Honeywell, Kansas, where Bill Goode had sold them. Some of the cowboys that worked for dad were in the drive too. That driver was an interesting thing.

“Of course, the old timers had educated the Indians to the fact that it wasn't worthwhile to raid the drives, so we didn't have that to bother with. We had stampedes to contend with. You had that in any bunch. It sort of depended on the weather. If you had bad weather, stormy, or hail, you could depend on a stampede. A stampede is a thing you don't have rules to go by. It is more of a spontaneous thing. The steers decide to run, and you get out and do your dead level best to get them to stop by trying to turn the leaders and getting the herd to milling. There would be some of the boys flanking the herd to keep them from scattering that way too. Another thing about stampedes is that just anybody couldn't turn a herd. You had to be a top notch puncher and riding an ace hoss to be able to get out in front of a herd that is doing it's best to go someplace in the least time possible.

Now, I would like to describe just how it is to be out in front of a thundering herd that wouldn't think a thing about running over you and smashing you beyond recognition, describing the dread you had of having your hoss step in a gopher hole and falling down on your leg, holding you 'til the herd could run over you, and [all?] about it but I couldn't

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tell it if you had a gun on me. [As?] I said before, they started to running, and you did the 3 best you could, and in the end, so much had happened that you couldn't remember it all. Besides, you were so tired that you didn't crave to chin about it. You know, I have read tales and descriptions of stampedes but I couldn't for the life of me, tell you about those I was in.

“Now, the tales I mentioned, that's a thing there was plenty of around a cow camp. If some of the boys that were best at telling them, had to live as long a life as the tales would indicate, they would be as old as old Methuselah. My mother always wanted me to sleep in the big house but the older I got, the more I worked the cattle in the company of other punchers, and they would tell me about the good times they had in the bunk house, the more I wanted to bunk with the cow hands.

“Mother finally gave in, and I went on down and slept in the [crum incubators?] with the other fellows. We always sat up late so the fellows that could tell the tall ones could see which one could best the other. I heard some mighty interesting things but the ones that interested me the most were about Old Mexico. We fellows never saw but just a few women on the range, and it is natural for a young fellow to be interested in them. These fellows knew this so they just fixed me up with tales of beautiful señoritas in old Mexico.

“One old fellow by the name of Slim Pickings told one that I liked to day dream about. It was mighty romancing. He says that he was riding through the country with his season's wages in a special money belt that fitted up under his left shoulder, and under a pistol holster that he had and carried over his shirt. He had enough money to keep him and wasn't especially looking for 4 a berth but was just taking in the scenery. He found a dead Mex' kid about 15 miles from Ruiz, and picked him up to take him into town so he could be identified. On his way in, he met an old [peon?] that recognized the kid and took it for granted that Slim had killed him and was taking him some place to hide him. This old peon was riding a donkey and he took out toward town as hard as he could whip it. Well, Slim was riding good hoss flesh and it wasn't a hill to overtake the old peon so he just did it. He

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finally got it over to the old peon that he didn't kill the kid but was just taking him to town so someone could take him home.

“This old peon takes Slim to the kid's home. The kid didn't have any parents, but he was supporting a sister. Now, this sister was an eye full, and here she was, nobody to take care of her. Nobody to cut the wood, nobody to bring the grub home, nobody to help her in any way. She was in a tight place, and there Slim stood. He says it was all his just for the taking. A good place with about 35 head of cows, plenty of wood, and opportunities for increasing the herd.

“About the time the senorita begins to let up on the crying jag, in walks an old Mex' woman with about 10 kids trailing. This old Mex' was big, fat, sloppy, and barefooted. He could just see himself there for life with about the same thing so he faded out.

“Now, this business of the women getting fat didn't fade me. I figured there must be plenty of good looking senoritas without marrying one of them so I got a craving to do Mexico. The more tales I heard about it, the more determined I was that my star shone 5 in that land of golden opportunity. Another tale a fellow by the name of Bob Winkle told, was about finding old Aztec Indian treasure chests. He said that parts of Mexico was once well peopled with wealthy Indians that had big cities and lots of gold ornaments.

“Bob says that while riding through the country in search of a place to light, he run across an old Mex' in a cave, high up in some hills. This old ox' was dyeing, and because Bob tried to help him, the old fellow started to babbling about gold bars in a cave near this place. Bob pays no attention to the babbling in order to revive the old man enough to tell a straight story and give a good description. The Mex' never comes to enough to tell it good but Bob thinks it was close to where he and the old fellow was. We says that he buried the old man, and then started into searching but since he was short rationed, he couldn't stay long enough to find it and left. He never did get ahead enough to go back and the gold is bound to still be there.

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"Well, this just added more fuel to the craving I already had so I was hard to hold on the place. Seemed like nothing ever happened on the place. When we were down on the farm, I often heard about rustlers and outlaws in the cow country but I never saw one. I'll tell you another thing. You never saw nor met a an old timer that would voluntarily tell about killing a man or hanging a rustler. I pumped a many a one but I never got results.

"One morning after we had been missing a few cows, the sheriff showed up and asked my mother where Dad was last night, or if he had been home, I don't recall just how it was worded but I do remember my mother's reply. She says, 'Huh! I've got too 6 much to do to ride herd on that maverick. If you want him wet nursed, do it yourself!'

"This thing happened a couple of months after the boys got back from the trail drive to Honeywell and it was almost winter. You know, ranchers don't do much work in the winter. Just as little as they have to but dad tells the sheriff he and some of the boys were out hunting strays in the brush and never got home 'til late. You know, they never did find out who hung them fellows. Couple of fellows and myself went out with the sheriff's party to cut them down. Some way or another, they thought it a good idea to let them hang all day so some of the other fellows throwing a loose rope could get an eye full. Maybe I should say, a healthy eye full.

"In the Fall of '79 when I was about 15, Dad gets the idea that if he had more land, he could raise more cattle and make more money so he leases a place on the Mason and Llano County lines. He couldn't rid himself of the first place 'til after we moved so I don't recall who bought the place. He makes a big splash in this new ranch and is going fine along about the time I decides to light out for Mexico.

"I was 23 at the time, and had my own cow pony. [?] hoss I called Belle, and she was a good one for sure. Dad bought me a brand new saddle, and paid \$35.00 for it. You could buy them more expensive in those days but this was above the average price paid and it was a beaut. I had a pair of boots about two months old and they still had the new

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on them. I had a ten gallon sombrero that I only used for dress purpose, so it was good too. Then, my two pearl handled, colts 45's were shiny and pretty, and the 7 Winchester carbine that I carried in a saddle scabbard was kept in ace condition. I forgot to tell about the snakeskin band on my sombrero. It was a beaut and had eight pieces of silver about the size of a silver dollar on it. Man! I looked the part of a big rancher on dress parade.

"Well, the boys all throwed a party to give me a sendoff that was a honey. After saying goodbye, I started out. When I got to Juarez, Mexico, across from El Paso, Texas, I rounded out, or put a finishing touch on the education I got on the ranch. When I got to Juarez, I decided to do the town. Here I was, all macked out and getting the eye of everybody around so I decided to give them all a chance to see me. I starts out at the Central Cafe which, by the way, is now almost a land mark because it has been there so long.

"After a few drinks, I meets three fellows on a sight seeing tour from Fort Smith, Arkansas. They seemed to have plenty of money but didn't like the taste of liquor very well. They were sampling it occasionally to get a little experience. Now, thinks I to myself, here is an opportunity to add a little to the kitty so I asks them if they can play poker. One of them wasn't very gabby but the other two said they all played a little back in Arkansas. Well, now this was right in line for me so I suggests we use one of the semi-private booths you can have there in the old Central.

"We gets to playing, and I wins every pot for the first hour. Man! I was going like a house a-fire and stood to clean 'em out like a prairie fire. About the second hour, I just won 8 half the pots but I was breaking even and stood to get back into the winning streak again. You know, at the end of about four hours playing, I had lost every cent I had. About \$350.00. The quiet fellow won everything from all three of us, but he was nice about it. He gave us a saw buck to get a drink with.

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"The other two fellows and myself goes and drinks this money up. While we are drinking, we decides that we have been took so we makes an agreement to hunt this fellow up and make him come across. [We?] agrees to spread out and the one that finds him, come back and get the other two so we could all three be there and have a better show. Well, I hunts and hunts and hunts. I never saw the man we were looking for nor I never saw the other two again. When I look back at it all now, I must have been one of the kind of fellows that made [?] life/ a thing to be enjoyed by gamblers.

"Well, there I was without a cent to eat on and I didn't want to wire dad for money because he would laugh at me when he sent it. The first thing I did was to trade my sombrero to a fellow for his old hat and a little boot. Next, went my bear skin chaps, and so on 'til my hoss was the only original thing I owned. I decides to light out of town and look for a berth on one of the Mexican ranches.

"These ranches had Mexicans working mostly and I sure didn't like to work with them so I changed jobs just about evry month or two. Sometimes I had to pull my belt up a notch or two because the well known southern hospitality didn't run on down into Mexico. The best people to feed a hungry fellow was the peon class that didn't have enough to feed themselves. I was 9 used to a country that had the latch string hung on the outside for folks to come in and help them selves. Why, if a fellow found out that you had passed by without going in and taking a little coffee or something to eat, he would be mad and would bawl you out.

"I rode and worked around over a good part of the Northern part of Mexico 'til I got a job on the 8-8 in the State of Chihuahua. The only thing I ever found out about the owners was that a group of Texas bankers controled it and hired American ram rods to run the spread. The few years I was on the 8-8 were happy ones. I had a job with a gold bunch of men that would share with you and give you the shirt off their backs if you asked for it. The only folks that had any trouble was the ram rods. They only held their jobs as long as the rancho showed a profit for the bankers. Sometimes we would have two or three ram rods

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in one year when one of them would get shot, or the count didn't measure up, or he would be too bossy and would have to leave before the boys put him in his three by six.

"The last ram rod they had and the one that was running the spread when I left was straight as a string. The bankers imported him from somewhere in Texas because he hated rustlers so. We never told it but rumor got around that a wild bunch rustled his parents[?] herd and killed them too. He was the hardest man on theives I ever saw. If a man was just suspicioned to be a loose [looper?], he just disappeared some day and nobody ever knew what became of him. We began to connect him with all of these disappearances but you couldn't pin anything on him and nobody wanted to anyway. That's another time it paid to keep a stiff upper lip and not even talk to yourself.

"This is the kind of a man that began to show up in Mexico. 10 It seemed like so much stealing on large and small scale had turned the Mexican people stronger against stealing than they were against murder. The ram rod's influence over me and the other boys caused us to feel that stealing was the worst of the crimes and we spread the feeling wherever we went.

"The result is the Mexico of today where there is practically no stealing whatever. The only stealing going on is the starving man that takes a calf here and there. [As?] far as the tourist trade is concerned, they can be sure that they will never be bothered by thieves. Tourists spend millions of dollars in Mexico today, and the Mexican government wants to keep it that way so that explains in part why a person's property and life is safer in Mexico than any where else in the world.

"Why, you take the United States here. Things happen every day like the thing that happened to my brother in law. He was running a filling station half way between Fairfax and Ponoa City, Oklahoma, and a car stopped there one night after he had gone to bed. The men argued him into going down and giving them some gas. He went down, and after



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filling them up with oil and gas, they shoots him and takes what little change he had in his pockets.

“Result, a widow with a filling station to run that she couldn't possibly hope to run, and three kids, they the fellows got a light sentence for second degree murder. If it had been in Mexico, they would have been shot on sight for the robbery and then they would have been given a light sentence for the murder. You know, if a man doesn't stand to gain by a killing, he wont kill. If he knows he will meet instant death without [mercy?] for 11 robbery, he aint so fast on the trigger.

“Well, lets get back to me now. In the days when the cattlemen were cleaning up Mexico, there was a good deal of rustling going on. You didn't know when you went to work for a rustler because it was so common. You just hired out, and if they told you not to be so careful about the brand but just round up everything in sight, you knew you were working for a rustler but you didn't dare to say anything. Besides, these [?] paid higher wages than anybody else. The only thing about it I didn't like was the way they went out of business. They got kind of floaty, sort of dancing in the air [literally?], with a rope around their kneck connected with a good stout tree limb. That was one of the reasons I kept changing jobs.

“When I started in with the right crowd, there were some that were rustlers and just changed sides in order to drive rustling from Mexico. They realized there was steady money in ranching, and not near so hazardous so they pitched and helped clean up. I saved my punching money for a couple of years and got me a lease 150 miles south of Gallegos,/ State of Chihuahua Mexico, where I started a small spread of my own. There wasn't any limit to the acreage I could use so I had plenty of room to grow. Today, I run 1500 head of fat cattle on this place and 500 that belong to Manuel Garcia. This Garcia is a fellow that doesn't have much cow sense so he shares with me for me managing his herd. That satisfies him and just tickles me plumb pink. He calls his brand the, 'Walking X' or [?]. My brand is the X Bar, or X.

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“The reason you were able to meet me today is because I came in to see about marketing some cattle. This is my first trip to the States in 15 years. My folks live at Fairfax, Oklahoma.